



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

Milestone in New Embassy Construction

Ambassador Tops Out Concrete on Largest U.S. Embassy in Sub-Saharan Africa

On Monday, April 20, 2009, U.S. Ambassador Donald Yamamoto assisted construction crews in the final concrete placement on the roof structure of the new chancery under construction on the existing U.S. embassy compound along Entoto Road. The event also marked the "Topping Out" milestone of the superstructure for the largest U.S. chancery in sub-Saharan Africa. The ambassador was accompanied by the DCM, and representatives of Em-

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Ambassador Donald Yamamoto tops out concrete on the new U.S. Chancery under construction.

Clean Ethiopia, Clean Earth: U.S. Embassy Launches New Recycling Program



Ambassador Yamamoto and Aquapure owner Mohammed Seid at the launching ceremony.

On Earth Day 2009, the United States Embassy in Addis Ababa launched a program to recycle the plastic bottles used in our offices and employees' homes. The program will facilitate the reuse of the crushed plastic and help keep Addis Ababa clean by reducing waste.

Ambassador Donald Yamamoto and Embassy employees officially kicked off the program on April 22 at the Embassy compound. Ambassador Yamamoto said, "As residents of Addis

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A Day for Feasting and Fun: Embassy Volunteers Share Easter Cheer, Traditions

In both the United States and Ethiopia, Easter is an important holiday when Christian families spend time together and feast. While the spirit of the holiday is the same in both countries, the celebrations are quite different, especially for children. Many American children, in addition to going to church, visiting relatives and eating a special meal like Ethiopian children, spend Easter day playing games like “hunting” for hidden “Easter eggs” in the garden. And while many Ethiopian children wake up to new clothes for the holiday, American children crawl out of bed to find baskets of treats that have been delivered during the night by a mysterious creature, “the Easter Bunny.”

This year, thanks to a group of volunteers from the U.S. Embassy, the Easter Bunny made an appearance in Addis Ababa! The Bunny and the volunteers spread holiday cheer by organizing an Easter party for the children at the Layla House orphanage. On April 16, 150

Ethiopian children at Layla House, ages infant to 13 years, spent the day eating, playing games, hunting for Easter eggs, and doing art projects. The American volunteers provided a basket of age-appropriate treats and toys for each child, hid 1,800 candy-filled eggs for the children to find, and organized face painting and art activities. Jennifer Sanford, one of the lead

volunteers, said, “It was great. The kids had a blast!” Ivy Dash, the Layla House Volunteer Coordinator, thanked the group for their efforts: “I was absolutely amazed. I couldn’t have asked for – or even imagined -- more!”

Jennifer and the other volunteers started planning for the Easter event more than two months in ad-

having a whole group of people paying attention to them really raised their morale.”

Sharing the holiday also raised the spirits of the American volunteers, many of whom are living far away from their families while they work in Ethiopia. Kelly Folliard, of the Embassy’s Political Section, noted, “At home on Easter, we would go



Easter party volunteers from the U.S. Embassy

vance. They asked family, friends and colleagues from home to send funds or donations for the Layla house kids. By April, they had collected more than U.S.\$2000 in materials. Asked why he decided to help with the project, embassy employee Julio Rios said, “This was something I hadn’t done before. I’d never done volunteer work. It was really fun. The kids loved it, and

to my grandma’s house. Since I’m far away this year, it was nice to share my holiday traditions with the kids and to learn how Ethiopians celebrate.” Jennifer Sanford agreed: “This was a good way to share some of our culture, and also to give the kids a good time.” ♦

U.S. Government Supports Initiatives of Prevention with Positives Programs

Workshop Reviews Draft Ethiopian Prevention with Positives Strategic Framework

Participants in a one-day workshop on Tuesday April 21 reviewed a draft of the Ethiopian Prevention with Positives strategic framework, with the aim of better integrating the PwP program into established programs addressing prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) and sexually transmitted infection (STI). The workshop also set a platform for the development of a plan to adopt HIV-prevention materials for use by non-health professionals.

As the result of the Ethiopian government's and its partners' efforts, the availability of HIV treatment and the numbers of HIV-positive persons accessing treatment in Ethiopia has increased dramatically in the last five years. In Ethiopia, about

133,000 people currently receive treatment for HIV. Their treatment provides an important opportunity to routinely reach a large number of HIV-infected persons with prevention messages and interventions. Therefore, the HIV care and treatment setting is a key starting point to integrate prevention programs for greater impact.

In recognition of the importance of positive prevention, the United States Government Emergency Plan (PEPFAR) has supported a special initiative to develop a comprehensive package of HIV prevention interventions, both behavioral and biomedical, to be used with HIV-infected persons in resource-limited settings. Funded by PEPFAR and with technical assistance by Cen-

ters for Disease Control and Prevention in Ethiopia (CDC-E), International Training and Education Center on HIV/AIDS (I-TECH) is a lead PEPFAR partner on "Prevention with Positives" in Ethiopia. I-TECH plays a central role in adopting this generic set of HIV prevention materials by organizing consultative workshops for technical experts, program managers, and service providers drawn from a wide range of institutions to review the materials.

The workshop participants included Government of Ethiopia offices, regional health bureaus and HAPCOs, PEPFAR Ethiopia, UN agencies, HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment implementing partners, associations of PLWHA and public relations and media experts. ♦

Clean Ethiopia, Clean Earth: U.S. Embassy Launches . . .

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Ababa and members of the community, it is our duty to help keep the city clean. The Embassy recycling program is an important 'green' step to that end." He encouraged embassy employees and their family members to protect the environment by reducing, re-using, and recycling materials whenever possible.

The U.S. Embassy is partnering with a local company, Aquapure General Trading, to implement the plastic recycling program. Aquapure, which employs nearly 150 Ethiopians, recycles plastic for a range of businesses in Ethiopia and exports it for industrial use. At the recycling program launch, Aquapure owner Mohammed Seid noted that the U.S. Embassy is his first client from the diplomatic community. Seid has been involved with the recycling industry for more than ten years.

The new plastic recycling program will complement the U.S. Embassy's existing paper recycling program, a partnership with the local NGO, "Treesavers." ♦



Obama Praises Constructive Talks at Summit of the Americas

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama said the United States entered the fifth Summit of the Americas in equal partnership with the nations of the Western Hemisphere based on mutual respect, common interests and shared values, and leaves after three days of constructive talks with what he called a good first step.

"I do believe that the signals sent so far provide at least an opportunity for frank dialogue on a range of issues, including critical issues of democracy and human rights throughout the hemisphere," Obama said at a news conference marking the end of the Summit of the Americas April 19. "The test for all of us is not simply words, but also deeds."

The leaders of the Western Hemisphere agreed that the goals and hopes for the Americas depend on strong democracies, good governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The summit was held April 17–19 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, among the 34 democratically elected leaders of the Western Hemisphere. Cuba, while not invited to attend the conference, was nevertheless a subject discussed from the first moment it opened.

Obama, recognizing the demands for a change in U.S.-Cuban relations, called for "a new beginning with Cuba" in his opening remarks on April 17. "I know that there is a longer journey that must be traveled to overcome decades of mistrust, but there are critical steps we can take toward a new day."

Cuban President Raúl Castro had said April 16 that he was prepared

and opportunity for the Cuban people. The United States will allow Cuban Americans to visit their families in Cuba whenever they wish and send any amount of funds back to family in Cuba whenever needed. In addition, the United States will permit telecommunications companies to receive licenses to market cellular telephones and other devices in Cuba and allow Cuban Americans to pay for them for family members still in Cuba.

But the president said the Castro regime can take some immediate steps to improve the lives of Cubans by releasing political prisoners, offering greater freedoms to Cuban citizens, and by not imposing excessive fees on money sent by Cuban Americans to their families in Cuba.



U.S. President Barack Obama speaks at the 5th Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, on April 17. (AFP/Jim Watson)

NEW FINANCING OFFERED

to discuss every issue and concern the United States has. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said April 17 that the United States welcomed Castro's comments, but noted that words have to be met with deeds.

Obama said to the summit's opening session that he was "not interested in talking for the sake of talking. But I do believe we can move U.S.-Cuban relations in a new direction."

The president has already changed one U.S. policy toward Cuba that he said had failed to advance liberty

Obama announced at the summit the creation of a new \$100 million microfinance growth fund for the Western Hemisphere. The current economic crisis is having a significant impact on the availability of finance for small businesses that provide the majority of the jobs in the hemisphere, Obama said. It is a factor that jeopardizes recent gains in poverty reduction, he said.

The microfinance growth fund is being built on a partnership of the Multilateral Investment Fund at the Inter-American Development Bank, the U.S. Overseas Private Invest-

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Milestone in New Embassy Construction . . .

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bassy offices and agencies, including USAID and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) who will relocate to the new chancery when completed in September 2010. The \$126.5 million project. An American contractor, B.L. Harbert International, LLC based out of Birmingham, Alabama, is building the U.S.\$126.5 million project, and employing more than 600 Ethiopian workers as part of their work force. In addition to employing local workers, the project will include local purchases in the range of more than U.S.\$5 million.” ♦

A group photo of some of the constructions workers with Ambassador Yamamoto and embassy officials. →



Obama Praises Constructive Talks at Summit of the Americas . . .

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ment Corporation and the Inter-American Investment Corporation, Obama said.

The president also announced expanded support for the Inter-American Development Bank's short-term crisis response through changes in lending limits and capital ratios, all with the objective of making more funds available to small and medium businesses that generally employ most workers in the hemisphere.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE PARTNERSHIP

Obama asked the hemispheric leaders to participate in an Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas, which would be a voluntary and flexible framework for advancing

energy security among nations and thwarting climate change. The president also said he was asking U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu to advance cooperation with his counterparts in June at the Americas Energy Symposium that will be held in Peru.

And the president pledged his commitment to working with hemispheric leaders toward a strong international climate agreement at the U.N. Climate Change Conference December 7–18 in Copenhagen. Obama also said he will work closely with Brazil, Canada and Mexico through the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate.

What foreign affairs decisions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog. ([http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-](http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/)

[should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/](http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/))

For more information on the fifth Summit of the Americas, please see Summit of the Americas: Advancing Prosperity (<http://www.america.gov/summit-america.html>).

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Obama Supports an Inter-American Arms Treaty

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Stemming the flow of illegal firearms into Latin America and the Caribbean from the United States is a significant concern because of the threat these weapons pose to people's personal security and well-being, President Obama says.

Obama said during a late-afternoon press conference in Mexico City April 16 that he will seek U.S. Senate ratification of an inter-American arms trafficking treaty that is designed to curb the flow of illegal firearms and ammunition to drug cartels and other armed groups operating in the Western Hemisphere.

"We are absolutely committed to working in partnership with Mexico to make sure that we are dealing with this scourge on both sides of the border," Obama said after meeting with Mexican President Felipe Calderon.

Obama's visit, the first by a U.S. president to the capital in 13 years, was designed to send a strong signal that the United States stands with Calderon and his administration, which is engaged in a conflict against heavily armed drug cartels.

"At a time when the Mexican government has so courageously taken on the drug cartels that have plagued both sides of the borders, it is absolutely critical that the United States joins as a full partner in dealing with this issue, both through initiatives like the Merida Initiative, but also on our side of the border,

in dealing with the flow of guns and cash south," Obama said during an arrival ceremony in Mexico City.

Personal security is one of a number of issues that will be discussed at the Summit of the Americas April 17–19 in Port of Spain, Trinidad

Explosives, and Other Related Materials — it is known by its Spanish acronym CIFTA. The White House submitted the treaty to the U.S. Senate on June 9, 1998, but it has not yet been ratified by the Senate.

U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat, and Richard Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, have asked the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to take up and pass the pact as a way to help stem a recent escalation in violence from Mexican drug cartels. In addition, Feinstein also sent a letter to the president, urging him to support ratification.

The convention helps members of the Organization of American States combat the illicit trade in firearms that fuels drug violence, terrorism and organized crime, the senators said in a prepared statement. It requires signatories to criminalize the illegal

manufacture and sale of weapons and establishes a marking and licensing system for the export and import of firearms.

The convention, which entered into force in July 1998, has been ratified by 29 OAS states, and four others, including the United States, have signed it.

"The convention will make the citizens of the hemisphere safer by helping shut down the illicit transnational arms market that fuels the violence associated with drug traf-

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President Obama and Mexican President Calderon in Mexico City April 16

and Tobago. Leaders from the 34 democratically elected nations of the hemisphere are meeting to consider an array of issues that directly affect them such as the current economic crisis, energy issues and climate change and security.

The Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the international convention on November 14, 1997, and the Clinton administration signed the treaty after that. The treaty is formally known as the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition,

United States Will Be Engaged in Arab-Israeli Peace Process

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The prospect of an Arab-Israeli peace still exists, but will require some difficult choices, says President Obama.

At a brief White House news conference April 21, Obama said that achieving a lasting peace and the creation of a Palestinian state requires resolution on the part of all involved parties.

"And it's going to require that we create some concrete steps that all parties can take that are evidence of that resolution. And the United States is going to deeply engage in this process to see if we can make progress," the president said shortly after meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II.

Abdullah said he agreed with the president's objective of a two-state solution that meets everyone's needs.

"I think we're looking now at the positives and not the negatives and seeing how we can sequence events over the next couple of months that allows the Israelis and Palestinians, and Israelis [and] Arabs to sit around a table and move this process forward," Abdullah said.

Abdullah said that President Obama has the full support of Jordan and the Arab League to move the Is-

raelis and Palestinians to fruitful negotiations as quickly as possible. "We believe that it is important for all of us to keep our eyes on the prize, and the prize is peace and stability finally for all the people of our region," Abdullah said.

Obama said he recognizes that the Israelis have formed a new coalition government in the past few weeks,

Obama said that diplomats can not talk forever, and that at some point steps need to be taken to meet the objectives of the talks — a two-state solution — but also to show that there is progress on the ground.

The president said he will discuss making progress when Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Washington in coming months. "My hope would be that over the next several months, that you start seeing gestures of good faith on all sides," Obama said.

"Ultimately, neither Jordan nor the United States can do this for the Israelis and the Palestinians," the president said. It is not in anyone's interest, Obama said, to perpetuate conflict.

What foreign affairs decisions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog. (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/>)

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦



President Barack Obama meets with King Abdullah of Jordan, Tuesday, April 21, 2009, in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

which was a complicated process in itself. This, the president said, is why Special Envoy George Mitchell continues to listen to the Israelis, Palestinians and to Arab partners in his visits to the region.

"Unfortunately, right now what we've seen, not just in Israel but within the Palestinian Territories, among the Arab states worldwide, is a profound cynicism about the possibility of any progress being made whatsoever," Obama said. "What we want to do is to step back from the abyss."

United States Expands Fight Against Pirates

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the United States is working on a long-term strategy that will thwart high seas piracy and restore maritime security to the Horn of Africa.

"These pirates are criminals. They are armed gangs on the sea," Clinton said. "And those plotting attacks must be stopped."

At a press briefing April 15, Clinton announced four immediate steps the State Department is taking in an expanded counter-piracy program. The first step is to send an envoy to attend an international Somali peacekeeping and development meeting in Brussels later this month. Currently, Ambassador John Yates, who was appointed two years ago, is the special envoy for Somalia and leads the Somalia Unit based at the American Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya.

And Clinton said she is calling for immediate meetings with U.S. partners in the international contact group on piracy to develop an expanded multinational response. "The response that came to our original request through the contact group for nations to contribute naval vessels has turned out to be very successful," she said. "But now we need better coordination."

A diplomatic team has been tasked to engage with Somali government officials from the Transitional Federal Government and regional leaders in Puntland, Clinton said.



A pirate "mother ship" photographed by the French Navy on April 15 in the Gulf of Aden

"We will press these leaders to take action against pirates operating from bases within their territories," she said. "The solution to Somali piracy includes improved Somali capacity to police their own territory."

The secretary said defending against high seas piracy must be a joint responsibility of governments, the shipping industry and maritime insurers. "I have directed our team to work with shippers and the insurance industry to address gaps in their self-defense measures," she said.

The announcement comes after the U.S. Navy on April 12 killed three pirates and captured a fourth after the pirates had kidnapped an American cargo ship captain off the coast of Somalia and attempted to hold him for approximately \$2 million in ransom. The French navy captured 11 pirates April 15 after intercept-

ing a "mother ship" or command vessel used by piracy gangs about 900 kilometers off the coast of Kenya.

Clinton said it may be possible to freeze assets from piracy gangs and block their ability to buy new and faster boats with which to conduct piracy operations across the Gulf of Aden off Somalia.

"We may be dealing with a 17th-century crime, but we need to bring 21st-century solutions to bear," Clinton said.

So far this year, at least 80 commercial cargo ships have been attacked in the 2.8 million-square-kilometer Gulf of Aden with 19 successful hijackings, according to the International Maritime Bureau. In 2008, there were 111 ships attacked and 42 successful hijackings. In 2008, 30,000 cargo ships passed through the gulf, the bureau said.

What foreign affairs decisions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog. (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/>)

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U.S. Applauds U.N. Conference Efforts to Re-focus on Racism

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — While the United States is boycotting the Durban Review Conference, it praised the efforts of many countries to re-focus the conference squarely on racism and discrimination.

The United Nations Durban Review Conference is being held April 20–24 in Geneva. Also known as the World Conference Against Racism, its purpose is to monitor and review the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA,) drafted during the World Conference Against Racism that took place in Durban, South Africa, in 2001.

But the United States, along with nine other countries, decided not to participate in the conference because the text of the Durban Declaration still contains language the United States long has said it is unable to support, according to a statement released by the U.S. Department of State. Anti-Israel and anti-free speech language in the declaration led to the U.S. delegation's decision not to participate.

"The DDPA singles out one particular conflict and prejudges key issues that can only be resolved in negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians," Robert Wood, State Department acting spokesman, said April 18. "The United States also has serious concerns with relatively new additions to the text regarding 'incitement' that run counter to the U.S. commitment to unfettered free speech."

Wood acknowledged that while the current declaration is significantly improved compared with prior ver-

sions, it seemed that concerns of the United States would not be addressed or adopted during the conference.



President Obama said the United States is interested in partnering with countries to reduce discrimination around the globe.

Speaking at an April 19 press conference, President Obama said the United States would be happy to work with the Durban Conference "if we can move forward on some of these issues."

"Hopefully some concrete steps come out of the conference that we can partner with other countries on to actually reduce discrimination around the globe. But this wasn't an opportunity to do it," Obama said.

UNITED STATES COMMITTED TO FIGHTING RACISM

"The United States is profoundly committed to ending racism and racial discrimination," Wood said. The United States "remains fully committed to upholding the human rights of all individuals and to fighting racial discrimination of every form in every context," he added.

The United States has had its own

struggles with racial discrimination, both Wood and Obama said. "This abiding commitment to the fight against racism and all forms of discrimination arises from the most painful pages of our history, and the most cherished values of our nation," Wood said.

Wood added that the United States will continue to work tirelessly with all United Nations organizations and with all nations to combat bigotry and end discrimination.

Evidence of this resolve is the Obama administration's recent announcement that it intends to seek a seat on the U.N. Human Rights Council and greater involvement in the United Nations in general.

The United States, Obama said April 19, is pursuing a seat on the U.N. Human Rights Council "because even though up until this point we haven't been very pleased with how it's operated, we think that it's worthwhile for us to go in there and try to make it into a constructive organization because of the extraordinary range of human rights violations that exist around the world. And I think America should be a leader; we can't opt out of those discussions."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a statement released by the State Department March 31, said: "The United States helped to found the United Nations and retains a vital stake in advancing that organization's genuine commitment to the human rights values that we share with other member nations. We believe every nation must live by and help shape global rules that ensure people enjoy the right to live freely and participate fully in their societies." ♦

Eager to Learn About the World, Tech Savvy Afghans Turn to Blogs

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Tech-savvy Afghans increasingly are turning to blogs for information about their country and the world. They also use blogs as a platform for telling their stories about Afghanistan to the world, says Nasim Fekrat, one of Afghanistan's trailblazing bloggers.

Although Internet penetration is not high in Afghanistan compared with other countries, since 2002, some 20,000 Afghans have started blogging, Fekrat told *America.gov*. Fekrat, who blogs under the moniker "Afghan Lord," estimates that at least 1 million Afghans access the Internet through Internet cafes and at local schools and universities.

Fekrat discovered blogs in 2000, when only two Afghan expatriates — one in Canada and one in the United States — were blogging in Farsi. He e-mailed them requesting more information and then taught himself how to use the medium. In late 2002, he launched his first blogs featuring his poetry and discussions of classical music. Later, he included discussions about events in Afghanistan as well as philosophical issues.

In 2008, Fekrat taught blogging workshops in Kabul and Bamyan. Approximately 40 people attended the three-day workshops. They shared 10 computers Fekrat was able to rent with funds he raised from donors over the Internet. He hopes to raise enough money to

repeat the classes again this year, sharing what he learned during his recently completed three-month fellowship at the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy at Duke University in North Carolina.

Barack Obama's deft use of Internet tools to send his message to voters,

Afghans, he said, "should build up the determination to end inequality and hatred toward each other."

"When I go back [to Afghanistan]," Fekrat said, "I will tell [my blogging students] about the media and morality. I'll tell them how we can't have exactly the same thing [as in



Afghans learn about blogging during Nasim Fekrat's workshop.

raise money and ultimately win the U.S. presidential elections profoundly impressed Fekrat. "This can be a model, a lesson to Afghanistan for presidential elections which are coming in a few months," he said.

Afghanistan's presidential elections are set for August 20. According to NATO officials, nearly 16 million voters have registered to vote — about half the country's population.

That an African American won the U.S. presidential elections is "a big lesson" for Afghans," Fekrat said.

the United States]; but with what we're able to learn, to transform in [an] Afghan way; not in a very traditional way.

"We can change," he said. "We can bring a picture of different models of Afghanistan."

Many Afghans never learned about democracy, according to Fekrat. "Rather they heard communism, socialism, equality, Marxism, those ideas based on Marxist theory." Compounding the problem, he said, is widespread illiteracy. "Those

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Eager to Learn About the World, Tech Savvy Afghans Turn to Blogs . . .

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people, who never heard democracy, freedom, freedom of speech and human rights ... they have to have an idea, a description of democracy that they never had," he said.

"The meaning of democracy was not transformed in the context of Afghan meaning, Afghan knowledge, Afghan language," he said. For many of the uneducated people, he said, democracy means little more than women discarding their head scarves.

AFGHANISTAN'S NEW GENERATION: GENERATING CHANGE

"The new generation is not the generation of Taliban," Fekrat said. "The new generation — they are simply about learning. ... They want to connect themselves to the world."

Blogging and the Internet won't reach Afghanistan's illiterate poor, and Afghan society, Fekrat acknowledged, is highly controlled by tradition, religion, differing tribal customs and fear of retribution. Even so, there is a core population of young people interested in change, according to Fekrat.

Afghans who blog enjoy a lively forum for discussion, Fekrat said. "They're talking about elections, presidential elections. Hundreds of articles are published in Web sites. There is debate among them. They're discussing the issues," he said.

"I'm sure there are lots of misunderstandings, misconceptions and biased information from Afghanistan," Fekrat said. If given the proper tools, young Afghans could provide a more accurate picture of their country, Fekrat said.

Although Fekrat blogs in both English and Farsi, the vast majority of Afghans blog in Farsi. But Fekrat would like to see the viewpoints of the Afghan people reach a wider non-Farsi speaking audience. His plan is to teach Afghans to do video interviews and podcast interviews with subtitles in English. Once again, he's hoping to raise the funds for the video camcorders by soliciting donations online.

"You can find lots of Nasims like me in Afghanistan; lots of people will contact you and talk to you. You can learn a lot from Afghan society," Fekrat said.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Obama Supports an Inter-American Arms Treaty . . .

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ficking, terrorism, and international organized crime," a State Department fact sheet says. "While strengthening states' ability to eradicate illicit arms trafficking, this regional agreement is modeled on U.S. laws, regulations, and practices and protects the legal trade in firearms as well as their lawful ownership and use."

The three-year, \$1.4 billion Merida Initiative was developed by Mexico, Central American nations and the United States to help fight the drug cartels by enhancing law-

enforcement training and military equipment and improving intelligence cooperation.

To further assist Mexico, the White House on April 15 named a former U.S. Justice Department official to lead efforts to crack down on drug-related violence along the U.S. side of its southwest border with Mexico. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced the appointment of Alan Bersin, a former federal prosecutor, during a visit to El Paso, Texas. Bersin held the same post — dubbed "border czar" — during the Clinton administration.

And three Mexican drug gangs — the Sinaloa cartel, Los Zetas and La Familia Michoacana — have been placed on a list of significant foreign narcotics traffickers targeted for special sanctions, the White House said April 15. This action allows the United States to freeze all cartel assets in U.S. jurisdiction and bars Americans from dealing with organizations that may be linked or associated with these groups and their operatives. ♦

Women Make Inroads in U.S. Publishing Industry

By Sarah White
Staff Writer

Washington — When Cornelia Walter became the first woman editor of a major U.S. newspaper in 1842, many were doubtful that a woman could handle the job. When she left the Boston Transcript five years later, however, she received praise from around the country. The newspaper's owners said that while it had been an "experiment" and a "bold step" to place her at the top of the masthead, "her success has been triumphant."

Today, women more regularly make strides in the publishing world, as they lead companies to success and begin to earn wages on par with their male counterparts. Women are recognized as important consumers of publications, as well. On 2008, Folio magazine reported that, of the top 10 magazines in the United States, five were publications specializing in topics of interest to women.

Dubbed by the Financial Times as the "first lady of magazines," Cathleen Black is president of Hearst Magazines, the company that publishes many famous American women's magazines, including Good Housekeeping and Cosmopolitan. Black rose from working in sales to heading several companies, some of which she led from the brink of failure to stunning success.

Black credits her drive and ambition for taking her to the position of first publisher of what became the most-circulated daily U.S. newspaper, USA Today. "My message for women is that you really have to define what you want," Black told Elizabeth MacBride, a writer for Crain's New York Business.



Kari Ansari, Magazine publisher

tions, can testify that it is possible.

Ansari, who recently conducted a webchat with America.gov, started her career in publishing to fill a void in what she felt American media was offering. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, she and her husband, both practicing Muslims, felt frustrated by negative media attention toward Muslims and Islam, including portrayals of Muslims in articles written by Muslims for



U.S. magazines fight for shelf space (left), but that hasn't deterred America's Muslim Family Magazine from filling a void.

AN AMBITION FOR BALANCE

Many American women today want both a successful career and a family. In a competitive and demanding field like magazine publishing, this can seem a Herculean task. However, Kari Ansari and Jane Ottenberg, publishers of niche publica-

Muslims. The couple wanted to create a "politics-free" magazine for the Muslim community that would focus exclusively on social issues affecting the average Muslim family in America.

They began publishing a free magazine in the Washington area in

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Home Renovation Project Spawns Green Building-Supply Business

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — In 2005, Jeff Rogers began planning for renovations to his Massachusetts house. He wanted the house to be able to produce its own electricity and heat, but found it difficult to get the design advice and building materials he needed.



Jeff Rogers stands in front of his renovated, energy-efficient house.

So Rogers traded a career as an environmental engineer for another type of so-called "green" job — turning his family's 21-year-old hardware store and lumber yard into an environmentally friendly materials-supply business called New England Green Building.

New England Green Building continues to sell traditional building materials but is transitioning to environmentally friendly products for its entire inventory.

According to Rogers, wholesale prices of energy-efficient merchandise have dipped slightly as the number of companies making the products increases. (His customers have not always seen the effects of the lower prices because transportation surcharges due to high 2008 oil prices have been added.)

The pioneering business sells everything from rooftop solar panels to soy-based, toxic-free paints and countertops and roofing made from 100 percent recycled materials. Rogers' product line includes long-lasting lighting that uses 85 percent less electricity than traditional lights, formaldehyde-free insulation and biodegradable cleaning products.

All the lumber Rogers sells is certified as having been grown and harvested in ways that do not harm the environment by companies that treat their workers fairly.

Rogers' customers come from all over the seven-state upper Northeast. His business and his home attract architects and designers from the area who come to learn about environmentally friendly materials.

The entrepreneur provides home-building advice to customers and employs up to 20 people, depending on the season. Unlike many small businesses suffering from the economic downturn, his company has no plans to lay off workers.

The increasing popularity of green buildings among homebuyers, Rogers told America.gov, is a bright spot in America's construction industry. (See "U.S. Homebuyers Vote for Energy Efficiency with Their Money (<http://www.america.gov/st/business-english/2009/April/20090310104042AKllennoC0M0.2718928.html>).")

In his own house, Rogers installed

such energy-saving features as a ground-source heat pump and solar electricity system. He patches the house's cracks using toxic-free insulation and caulk to conserve energy.

In 2007, the house was certified by the U.S. Green Building Council (<http://www.usgbc.org/>) as meeting its highest standards for energy conservation. The house was the first in New England and is just one of a handful of homes in America to receive the "platinum" Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (http://www.architectureweek.com/cgi-bin/wlk?http://www.usgbc.org/LEED/LEED_main.asp) rating.



Jeff Rogers displays some of his store's products.

More information on New England Green Building (<http://www.negreen.com/>) is available on its Web site.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

World Digital Library Offers Cultural Treasures from Around Globe

By Louise Fenner
Staff Writer

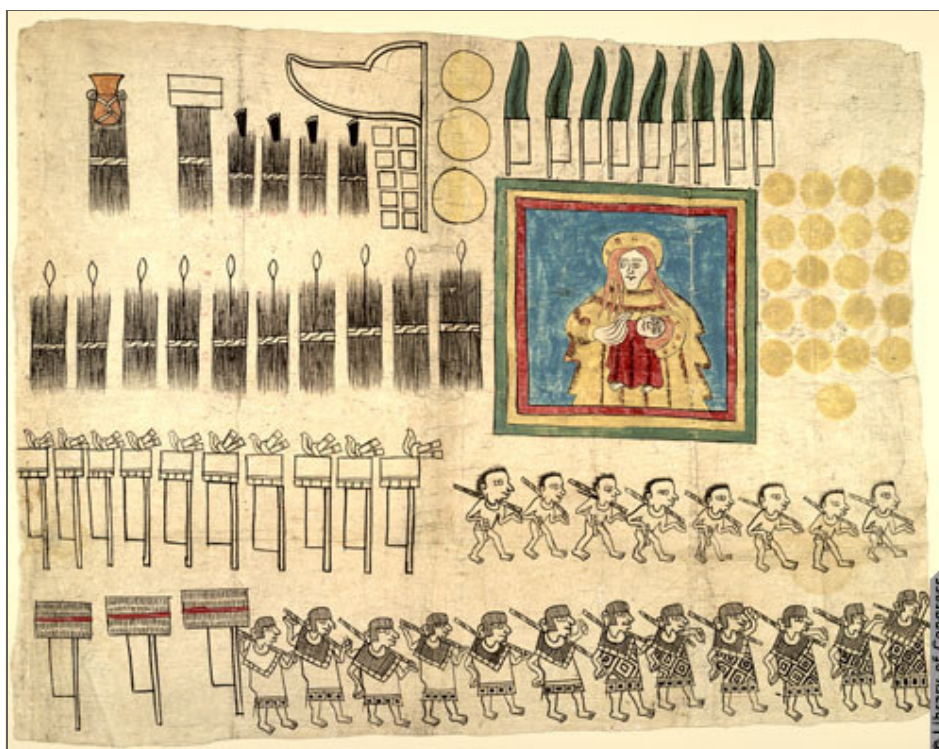
Washington — The World Digital Library (WDL) offers free online access to important, rare and interesting cultural treasures from around the planet.

Starting April 21, a vast multilingual collection of manuscripts, maps, rare books, sound recordings, films, prints, photographs and other cultural and historical materials can be viewed with the click of a computer mouse — and this is only the beginning of an ambitious project to share the contents of the world's libraries and cultural institutions.

The WDL's Web site functions in seven major languages, permitting users to conduct searches and read descriptions of the content in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish (the official languages of the United Nations) and Portuguese. All materials are presented in their original languages. For selected items, there are videos featuring discussions by expert curators.

More than two dozen libraries around the globe contributed the 1,200 digitized items from different eras and places that are now available for viewing. Among the treasures are calligraphic works in Arabic, Persian, Chinese and Japanese from the eight to the 19th centuries; early films, by the Lumière brothers in France, 1897–98, and Thomas Edison in the United States, 1899; and Miroslav's Gospel, a Serbian illuminated manuscript created around 1180.

The World Digital Library was launched April 21 at the headquar-



The WDL includes examples of Mesoamerican codices that document the history of Mexico in pictographic language. This one is from 1531.

ters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris — four years after the project was proposed by James Billington, head of the U.S. Library of Congress.

Billington envisioned a Web site that would "bring together in a single place what is most interesting and most important of the world's varied cultures."

"The focus of the project is on rare and one-of-a kind cultural items that are locked away in the great libraries of the world: oracle bones from China, ancient woodblock prints from Japan, scientific manuscripts from the Arab world, Columbus' letter announcing his discoveries in the New World," he said.

By increasing the quantity and diversity of cultural materials on the

Internet — and making them available in the original languages — the World Digital Library aims "to improve international understanding across cultures," Billington said.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Both UNESCO and the Library of Congress emphasize that another important goal of the project is to help bridge the digital divide among countries.

Universal access to information and knowledge is a fundamental principle for UNESCO, said Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO's assistant director-general for communication and information.

"There are hundreds of thousands of libraries," he said. "Once you empower them through the digitiza-

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See also

[http://www.america.gov/](http://www.america.gov)

Telling America's story

Women Make Inroads in U.S. Publishing Industry . . .

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2003. They delivered it, with their three young children in tow, to mosques and Muslim-owned businesses throughout the mid-Atlantic area. After a positive reception, the couple officially launched America's Muslim Family Magazine for a yearly subscription fee in 2005.

Ansari said that when she began her career in the early 1980s, she looked up to women who were successful in male-dominated business fields. Now, however, she is more drawn to women who are successful in their careers but who also focus on their families, women such as first lady Michelle Obama, a self-described "Mom in Chief."

Ottenberg is another leading lady in the magazine publishing field who does not believe success comes at the price of family life. After starting several local publications in the Washington area, she and her hus-

band began The Magazine Group, a publishing company specializing in custom magazines and digital media.

Ottenberg began a career in politics in the 1970s, a time during which most women either had careers or families, but not both. Sheppie Abramowitz, wife of an American ambassador and a politician in her own right, helped Ottenberg land her first job on Capitol Hill. Ottenberg admired Abramowitz for her commitment to her family and her career. "I want to be like that," Ottenberg remembers thinking. While she knows that being either the perfect mother or the perfect executive is impossible, Ottenberg said, she has always made sure her family feels important. "Whenever one of my kids called, I took the call," she said.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

World Digital Library Offers Cultural Treasures from Around Globe . . .

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tion process, then you create almost unlimited opportunities for people to access information and knowledge."

When a prototype of the WDL was unveiled in 2007, Billington said that "many countries will need to build capacity, both technical and human," to be able to create and access digital content. "This is part of the challenge and one that we welcome," he said.

The WDL prototype was developed by the Library of Congress, UNESCO and five other partners — the Bibliotheca Alexandrina of Alexandria, Egypt; the National Library of Brazil; the National Library of Egypt; the National Library of Russia; and the Russian State Library.

Currently, the WDL has 32 partners, including institutions that contributed cultural content, funding or technological or other assistance. It hopes to expand participation to all UNESCO member countries.

When the WDL prototype was unveiled, Rafaat Hilal of the National Library and Archives of Egypt invited participation "especially [by] those in the Middle East and all Arab countries and Africa." He added that "working together to bring your culture to the people is what the World Digital Library is all about."

Speaking at the April 21 launch ceremony, UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura said the World Digital Library "offers a platform for the free flow of informa-

tion, for international solidarity, for the celebration of cultural diversity and for the building of inclusive knowledge societies," and that it highlights "the social and cultural potential of digital technologies."

Furui Zhan, chief librarian of the National Library of China, a WDL partner, said, "The spirit of equality and open understanding comes into full view with the creation of this World Digital Library," and he pledged his library's close cooperation.

Billington called the launch a first step toward building a comprehensive online resource that helps "deepen our understanding of each other." He particularly encouraged young people to make use of the World Digital Library and "enjoy what is best in traditional culture, using the new media." ♦